

SkoolieLivin.com features detailed guides and articles covering all aspects of building and living in a skoolie.



Couple Turns Skoolie Bus Conversion Into A Business

By Lydia Noyes, Contributing Editor

Chris and Sarah Kochan of Pewaukee, Wis., downsized their lives to squeeze into a school bus. Now, they make a living teaching others to do the same. “A skoolie is a school bus converted into a mobile home,” says Chris Kochan. “They’re often referred to as a ‘tiny house on wheels’ and are popular among those seeking a mixture of minimalism, adventure and nomadic lifestyle without sacrificing life’s amenities.” Most include a kitchen, bathroom, and sleeping area made from house-quality materials, along with standard camper and RV features like

RV refrigerators, ranges and lighting. Some include solar panels or other off-grid features.

The couple didn’t expect to make their living space a livelihood. “In 2018, I was burned out from my corporate career at Apple,” Kochan says. “With a combination of savings and the dream of someday owning a business, I chose to leave Apple and realign our lives. A chance Instagram discovery of skoolies inspired us to buy and convert a 2000 International 3800 30-ft. school bus into our tiny home.”

At first, their goals were humble. “The skoolie was purely a cost-of-living reduction

to put more funds toward a future business,” Kochan says. “Even though a skoolie requires an upfront investment, it eliminates the long-term expense of rent. I had a decade of experience building websites, so I started SkoolieLivin.com to document our adventure. Little did we know that we would become one of the larger websites within the niche.”

Since their website’s launch, the Kochans have documented their skoolie conversion process and created a welcoming community for other enthusiasts. “Renovating a school bus into a livable home has been one of the most rewarding yet challenging experiences,” he says. “What started as an exciting project quickly turned into a marathon, requiring months of consistent effort. We learned firsthand that optimizing a bus’s limited space takes tremendous thought and creativity. Nothing in a school bus is square. Every cut, measurement and adjustment must be custom-fitted. It forces you to think creatively, even compared to standard DIY construction projects. But so long as you take on the conversion yourself, it can be cost-effective and a personally rewarding challenge in creativity and hands-on construction skills.”

The couple’s aim remains to ease the learning curve for others. “When we began our conversion, there were limited resources available. We spent hours researching and learning by trial and error, which gave us hands-on experience in almost every aspect of building a traditional house, from plumbing and electrical work to insulation and cabinetry, all within the constraints of a 150-sq. ft. space.”

Now that the Kochans live full-time in

their skoolie, ongoing renovations are the norm to match their constantly evolving lifestyles. “The skoolie conversion process is a crash course in problem-solving, creativity and adaptability,” says Kochan. “Still, the rewards of building a home uniquely tailored to our dreams made every obstacle worth overcoming. We’ve learned that logic and strategic planning are critical. For example, we internalized early on the importance of installing water and electrical lines before sealing up walls and mounting roof fixtures before installing the ceiling.”

Today, the couple remains dedicated to helping others achieve their skoolie dreams. SkoolieLivin.com features detailed guides and articles covering all aspects of building and living in a skoolie, offering insights into planning, construction and daily life on the road. “Our website’s filled with resources, including a ‘78-Point DIY Bus Inspection Guide’ for evaluating a bus or skoolie before purchase, and our book, ‘How to Skoolie,’ is filled with actionable information on downsizing, budgeting, making money and traveling while living in a school bus conversion,” Kochan says.

“Don’t let the fear of the unknown hold you back. There are challenges, but with the right resources, a strong community, and a determination to make it work, the skoolie lifestyle can lead to incredible experiences and unforgettable adventures.”

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Chris Kochan, 1256 Capital Dr., Ste. 700-130, Pewaukee, Wis. 53072 (www.skoolielivin.com).

Farm-Direct Markets Meat Using Freezer Drops

Josh Morrison and his wife Kiley make their direct market meat sales by placing freezers with retailers where they have a cluster of customers. The freezer drops work so well that the couple no longer spends hours matching delivery schedules with customer needs. Josh Morrison provided a detailed account of the transition in a recent edition of APPPA Grit, the publication of American Pastured Poultry Producers Association members.

In 2017, the couple established Earnest Roots Farm and began selling beef, pork, broiler chickens and eggs at a local farmers market. They switched to deliveries when they set up an e-commerce site through GrazeCart (Vol. 45, No. 5). After dealing with delays and no-shows when attempting deliveries, the Morrises decided to try freezer drops. Focusing on customer clusters, they sought out locally owned small businesses with which they could work.

“After several visits to their stores, I would pop the question,” says Morrison. “Hey, would you be open to hosting a freezer drop for us? To which they typically responded, ‘What in the world is that?’”

Morrison explained that it entailed placing a 7-cu. ft. freezer in their store. In exchange, they would get paid for the power the freezer would use in a year. The hosting store would also receive a percentage of sales that went through the freezer.

“So far, the store owners all use this credit to become our CSA members or buy products from us,” says Morrison.

Earnest Roots customers go to the e-commerce site to place an order, select a drop location and make a payment. Once the order is packed and tagged, the tag number and invoice are emailed to the customer.



Freezers placed at retail locations allow for less delivery and more flexibility for Earnest Roots Farm.

When an order is dropped off at the store, the customer’s name and tag number are added to a clipboard. The store owner is asked to verify these details when the customer picks up the order.

“The first freezer drop we established was in 2021,” says Morrison. “Today, we have four freezer drops with hopes of adding more.”

In addition to the freezer drops, the Morrises expanded sales by shipping statewide. These two initiatives have reduced delivery time and extended customer reach.

“The freezer drops have been a good fit for us by allowing us more time to spend on other things instead of driving all over,” says Morrison.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Earnest Roots Farm, 240 Angel Way, Ashville, Ala. 35953 (ph 256-504-5557; earnestrootsfarm@gmail.com; www.earnestrootsfarm.com) or American Pastured Poultry Producers Association (Issue 142).

Rancher Uses Unused Meat For Dog Treats

“I haven’t met a dog that didn’t like them,” says Arron Nerbas about Juno Bites, made and sold through his Manitoba family’s cattle ranch operation. Made from freeze-dried organ meats, the dog food is part of the Nerbas’ quest of “nose to tail,” utilizing every part of the beef cows they butcher and sell locally every month.

Nerbas’ parents, Gene and Cynthia, started with a cow/calf operation that evolved into raising registered Angus breeding stock. They and two of their sons, Arron and Shane, and their families own Nerbas Bros. Angus in Shellmouth, Manitoba. In recent years, they added direct marketing meat, working with a butcher and selling locally at The E Butchery on Main in Russell, Manitoba, where frozen cuts of the grass-raised beef are sold by weight through a vending machine.

The store also sells Juno Bites in 80-gram bags for \$10.

“It’s actually a free product for us,” Nerbas says. There’s minimal cost for the butcher to slice and vacuum seal the organ meat (kidney, heart, liver and tongue) in pound bags kept in a separate freezer. When store supplies are getting low, Nerbas thaws and drains the raw meat and spreads it out on the four trays of a small freeze dryer for an average of 18 to 20 hrs.

“By freeze-drying, you keep 95 percent of the nutritional content,” Nerbas says. “I consider Juno Bites as a health supplement.”

The freeze-dried organs break up like wafers, are weighed, and are bagged for sale.



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“It’s our goal to add a value of \$400 (Canadian) per animal with this product line,” Nerbas says.

He adds that other commercial companies sell freeze-dried beef dog food, but customers prefer to buy products raised by people they know.

Shipping is currently too cost-prohibitive for internet sales, and the Nerbas family is focused on meeting local demands. That includes keeping plenty of Juno Bites at home for Juno, the 5-year-old beagle for whom the treats are named.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Nerbas Bros. Angus, Box 6, Shellmouth, Manitoba, Canada R0J 1Y0 (ph 204-773-6800; agnerbas@gmail.com; www.nerbasbrosangus.com; Facebook: The E Butchery On Main).